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ABSTRACT

Twenty-five undergraduate preservice teachers in the literacy block (a six credit hour block of reading and language arts methods courses) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln wrote their literacy autobiographies to fulfill one of the course requirements. These autobiographies help students' develop insights into their literacy past and present. The students gathered artifacts such as early school papers and report cards, documented their recollections, and interviewed significant caretakers. Data from the autobiographies are discussed within the following categories: attitudes about reading development in school; young readers' strategies in school; teachers' strategies for reading instruction; beyond the basal; attitudes towards written language in school; handwriting in school; beyond handwriting in school; home read alouds; reading before schooling; home reading during elementary school and during high school; home writing before schooling, during elementary school, during high school, and before college; oral language in the home; lacking enjoyment and lacking skills; enjoying reading; strategies readers use; enjoying writing; and barriers to writing. Analysis of the data indicates that not all preservice teachers loved reading and that they reported reading and writing for a wide range of reasons. Implications for the design of methods courses and for future research are discussed. (Contains 47 references.) (JDD)

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Preservice Teachers' Literacy Autobiographies and Teacher Development

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Preservice Teachers Literacy Autobiographies and Teacher Development

Twenty five undergraduate preservice teachers in the literacy block, a six credit hour block of reading and language arts methods courses, wrote their literacy autobiographies to fulfill one of the course requirements. Their findings, as they researched their literacy pasts and worked to understand their present literacy activity, are analyzed and presented in this paper. I rely heavily on their voices because they speak so clearly about their feelings, beliefs, and experiences.

Consistent with theories of learning which are fundamental to the literacy block (Vygotsky, 1978; Duckworth, 1987), one goal of this paper is to gain insights into the literacy past and present of preservice teachers in order to develop a course which accepts, builds upon and celebrates their differences as an ongoing part of the learning environment of the classroom. The demonstration in the way that Smith (1981) uses this word, of such building, acceptance and celebration is an important facet of the classroom setting. It is believed that the literacy autobiographies will be one vehicle for demonstrating to (and with) preservice teachers literacy activity which is theoretically grounded.

Another goal of this paper is to support the many voices of preservice undergraduate teachers in the research and instruction community. As we become more aware of the differences in our classrooms, we may choose to become more responsive in the way we design courses and our expectations of our students in their coursework and, subsequently, when they enter their own classrooms as teachers.

Framing the Study

In the past twenty years, few studies have included undergraduate preservice teachers' **attitudes** towards their own literacy. Gray and Troy (1986) report that 29 of the 80 preservice teachers they interviewed were reading a book at the time of the study. They also suggest that teachers who read for information, rather than pleasure, are not modeling reading as a pleasurable process.

Mueller (1973) studied graduate and undergraduate students. One fourth of the twenty one students in her studied preferred reading a book to watching television. Mueller believes that a teacher's attitude toward reading influences the students in that teacher's classroom and suggests that the teachers study their own attitudes towards reading in order to, "confront, acknowledge and clarify their own values in this important subject [because] . . . the teacher who has clarified his [or her] own values can help his [or her] pupils understand, accept, or possibly change their reading values" (p. 205)[1].

Manna and Misheff (1987) found that preservice teachers felt that their relationship with the teacher influenced how much they would read in a given class. The preservice teachers in their study had negative recollections about book reports and reading groups. Manna and Misheff conclude that preservice teachers fall into one of two categories. "Reduced readers" (p. 166) are described as "self-proclaimed reluctant readers" (p. 167) and "transactional readers" (p. 166) are those who read the way Rosenblatt (1978) describes readers in a relationship with the text.

The exhaustive review of reading teacher education recently provided by Alvermann (1990) does not address the area of preservice teacher's

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[1] I make every effort to include all genders by adding bracketed words, when necessary.

attitudes towards literacy; her focus is on "conceptions" (p. 687) or models of teacher education. She does point out the need for more long term studies of the professional development of reading teachers. Twenty years ago there was considerable concern about teachers' attitudes about literacy and their literacy practices. Cogan (1975) was shocked that teachers read few professional journals; the journals teachers in his study chose to read focused on practical ideas for the classroom. Cogan did not study the teachers' literacy beyond professional reading. Mour (1977), however, did examine teachers' reading across a variety of genres. Just over one half of the 224 teachers in his study had read a professional book or two in the year prior to the study. He found many more than that who regularly read newspapers and lay magazines such as *Better Homes and Gardens*. Fiction was, by far, the choice of reading genre of the teachers in Mour's study. Mour does not hide his disappointment at the lack of reading, professional and nonprofessional, in which teachers engage. He suggests that schools develop professional sections in their school libraries and, that "teachers should begin to 'practice what they preach' . . . and set aside time each day for reading. . . " (p. 401) because "children use teachers as models" (p. 397).

> Manning (1979) is quite explicit in his demands of teachers:
>
> We need teachers of reading who are themselves well read. We need reading teachers who are as conversant with Thomas More as they are with teachers' manuals.
>
> We need teachers who can use English literature and history to educate, to entertain, and to inspire. The greatest dangers to the schools are much more internal than external; we suffer because we are pedestrian.

> Teachers of reading in the schools need to read, and to encourage the reading of quality children's literature and higher quality English literature. (p. 881)

The call for teachers to become readers is also made by Duffey (1973) and reiterated more recently by Searls (1987). Searls also found many teachers who were not active in their own literacy. She encourages teachers to "confront and clarify [their] own values with regard to reading" (p. 237) and urges teachers who are not readers to, at the very least, confront their dislike of reading in order to make more conscious efforts to instill positive attitudes in their students. Searls remains disconcerted that "one-third of the respondents thought that reading could be taught effectively by teachers who do not love reading themselves" (p. 237). She concludes by stating that 'teaching effectively' does not mean that the students are instilled with a passion for reading. According to Searls, teachers who do not love reading will probably teach children that reading is a tool. She agrees with Duffey (1973) that such teachers could learn, through the confrontation of their own reading values, to empathize with the child who is a reluctant reader. In the study presented in this paper, preservice teachers confront their literacy lives.

There is recent evidence that teachers are involved in their own literacy. Members of the Tucson TAWL (Teachers Applying/Attempting Whole Language) support a professional bookstore in Debra Jacobsen's (personal communication) home and members meet regularly to discuss professional books and children's literature. Teachers in other areas of the country are seeking grants to support their personal reading (Cardarelli, 1992). Teachers are engaging in discussion and study groups, such as the one reported by Short (1992) in which the teachers "explored how to develop innovations that come from our own current needs and interests. The study

group accommodated diversity and helped each of us develop our own paths to learning and transformation" (p. 15).

Descriptions of the North Dakota Study Group, the Philadelphia Learning Cooperative, and other teacher research and writing efforts (in Cochrane-Smith & Lytle, 1990) are further evidence of teachers involved in various facets of their own literacy as well as the literacy of their students. Teachers are publishing reports of literacy activity in their classrooms, evidence that they themselves are reading, writing, and thinking (Patterson, Santa, Short, & Smith, 1993).

Since one of the goals of the writing of our literacy autobiographies was the design of a course which would build from my students initial views and attitudes, I searched for other preservice teacher educators who share my philosophy of learning and teaching. The emerging popularity of teacher study groups, discussed above, is fundamentally joined to processes in some methods classrooms, including the literacy block I teach. The courses and study groups have a common theoretical base in holistic learning. Preservice teachers are meeting instructors in their methods courses who move beyond discussions of theories; methods courses are becoming forums for enactment of theory.

Short and Burke (1989) describe the teacher educator as a "mediator between the learner and the content to be learned, between the knower and the known" (p. 205). Buchmann (1990) suggests that preservice teachers need "breaks" with experience which will help them confront their attitudes.

> Breaks with experience in teacher education, like any educational idea or practice, must be judged by the extent to which such breaks can help people come into their own in thinking, learning, and knowing, thus escaping the blind alleys of circumstance. (Buchmann, 1990, p. 14)

The call for such preservice teacher classroom activity and the call to treat students "as learners who are encouraged to engage actively in learning rather than as containers to be filled" (Kelly & Farnan, 1990, p. 264) is not new. Mour (1977) suggests that preservice teachers be exposed to a wide variety of genre in their methods courses; preservice teachers should read pragmatic, theoretical, and research genres. The nagging question is how do we "instill in . . . future teachers an interest in reading and a desire to read themselves" (Gray & Troy, 1986, p. 184)? It was with the background issues outlined in this brief section that *I* approached my students with concerns about their literacy lives and the design of the literacy block.

Research Methods

The students in the literacy block were co-researchers in this project in that they were instrumental in gathering data and making some sense of that data when they wrote their literacy autobiographies. A course requirement, such as writing a literacy autobiography, will only become an authentic (Wortman, 1991) research and writing activity when the participants agree to its importance. This involved presenting the idea to the class, dealing with their many concerns and questions, and discussing the nature of evidence in a research project of this nature. Each of these issues is discussed in this section.

Presenting the Idea to the Class

> **Rick**[2]: Good morning. Today, as promised, I will present one of the project ideas for the literacy block. Each of us has certain attitudes or beliefs about our own literacy. We developed these as a result of our experiences and the ways in which we thought about and responded to

[2] The preservice teachers in this study have been assigned pseudonyms; 'Rick' refers to the researcher.

those experiences. Now, relax, and try not to get too upset. I'm going to say the 'R' word.

In order to learn more about our own literacy, we will do a RESEARCH project into our own literacy. We will study ourselves to gain insights into how we got to where we are today as readers and writers.

With the introduction above, the idea of a literacy autobiography was presented to the undergraduates in the literacy block. Before I could finish, the deluge of questions ensued. "How long does it have to be?" "Does it have to be typed?" "Do we have to do something in the library?" From this point, I worked at focusing the students on their own lives, explaining that this is a primary research project. They would go into the "field " of their own experiences to find out about themselves. I explained to the class that I would also engage in this project and that we would present our literacy autobiographies to each other in two weeks.

Some of the students were quite anxious about this project. They wanted more of a frame for their research so they would know what I "wanted" as the teacher. I had copies available of the reading and writing surveys Nancie Atwell (1987) has her students use and the Burke Interview (in Goodman & Burke, 1987). We discussed these questions as possible places to start. Interestingly, on the day of our presentations it was clear that only two students followed one of these surveys formally, two students used some of the same language as one of the surveys, and the rest of the class did not rely on the surveys to frame their papers.

The Nature of Evidence

During the following class session, a discussion of the nature of evidence arose. One of the students pointed out that recollections might not

be the best thing to rely upon for this type of work. She said that they were biased and typically not "true". We wrote in class for ten minutes about a recollection we have from our experiences in school. If they could recall a literacy event, that was fine, but that did not have to be the focus of this recollection. Most of the students wrote of unhappy events during their schooling. I asked if this was evidence.

Some students were quite vehement that recollections are evidence. They believe that if we recall something a certain way, that is the way that it influences our present belief system. Most of the students agreed. We then discussed other sources of evidence. One student had called her parents to find out more about her literacy development. She recounted parts of the conversation, but wanted to save the rest for the day we would present our autobiographies. Another student had gone home to look through her closet, the garage, and under her bed for evidence of her literacy development. Students began to recall worksheets, workbooks, characters in basal readers, favorite books and more. I encouraged them to write these things down. Our conversations over the next week and a half supported and enhanced recall for other students as events, experiences, and artifacts began to flow back from the past.

The students were dealing with issues of triangulation (Guba and Lincoln, 1982) and epistemology (Lehrer, 1990). They wanted a high degree of credibility for their conclusions and were willing to search for evidence which would support them. Rather than relying solely upon recollection, many came to believe that 'truth' is substantiated by various focal points all supporting a conclusion.

Presenting Literacy Autobiographies

The students presented their literacy autobiographies to each other in small groups. Each member of the class did not hear everyone else's because of time constraints. The smaller groups allowed for more response and discussion following each presentation. I asked the students to read what they wrote verbatim, followed by time for discussion. I joined one group with my literacy autobiography, but found that other groups were demanding attention so I left mine to be read by a student if the group had time after listening to *all* the other members of that group. There was laughter and crying, sounds of awe and wonder, and a strong sense of community emerged as common experiences were shared.

Most of the students had invested considerable time and energy on their projects. There were writing samples that were many years old, baby pictures, school pictures, finger paintings, stories, published articles and more. One student had a description that her mother had written as part of her evidence. Their feelings about literacy ranged from love to disgust and hate as they took risks at being honest and sincere.

It is noteworthy that the page range was from one page, handwritten, to over fifteen pages of typewritten text supported by artifacts. Some of the students incorporated discussions of evidence into the written part of their autobiographies.

> **Melanie:** There is not much evidence from my early elementary years that shows how my literacy developed. This is because I come from a fairly large family and my mother had neither the time or space in our house to collect each of my siblings papers plus my own.[3]

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[3]All of the students' voices are quoted directly from their written literacy autobiographies unless stated otherwise.

Lynette: My mother is not the type of person who collects things for keepsake purposes. So when I called mom and asked her if she had any of my old grade school papers she replied with a laugh. Instead we reminisced about my infancy and early childhood.

Not all of the students were not happy to find that their school work, which took on more prestige with each class discussion, had not been saved.

Cheryl: My mother hasn't kept any of my school work and when I heard that I was a little upset. She seems to keep everything else she comes in contact with, but not her children's school work!!!

There was, overall, a flood of evidence in our classroom on the day we shared our literacy autobiographies. Students brought report cards, notes from teachers, baby books, workbook pages, worksheets, coloring sheets, books they had written, stories, songs, poems, and interview results and notes from their parents. Of course, many relied upon recollections as evidence. These students represent some of the evidence presented in class.

Jane: The Witch with the Pointed Nose

Once upon a time there was a witch with a pointed nose. She did not like her pointed nose. She was the only witch with a pointed nose. One time she had a party. Every buddy laughed at her nose. She did not like that very much. One day the witch tried to make a spell. Hockus-pockus-ding King dokys. Make my pointed nose in fokus. But just then her pointed nose disappeared but then she went out side and her cat had a pointed nose.

Well, there you have it. My first published story. And I was only seven years old. Pretty good, huh? Of course it was published by me (and edited and illustrated), and it was published on a flimsy piece of

cardboard, complete with cake batter splatters, and grease spots, but it was my work.

On the back is a carefully printed note from mom saying:

Mom went to the flower shop (work). I'll be back about 4:30. You can go play at your friends.

Selina: I spoke to my mother and read my baby book in order to find out about my literacy development. The two of these sources gave me information through the first grade.

Lynn: I talked with my parents and we sorted through boxes of things that my brothers and I brought home and saved over the years. As I sifted through the papers I wondered what would be a good example to share with someone who would want to know about my literacy, including myself.

Sharon: . . . my mom made me a scrap book and kept all my report cards, pictures, and some writings.

The students poured over their artifacts, noticing the most minute details.

Jill: I also noticed a sheet of paper my class signed, including myself. My hand writing was the smallest and pretty neat.

Of course, report cards were brought in, analyzed, and compared.

Jane: In 2nd grade we moved from Panama to Kearney, NE. I had a difficult time adjusting to a new country, language, school, teacher, friends, etc., at first, [according to the report card].

Lynn: Kindergarten reports show that I was very interested in poems and stories, and did a good job of communicating with others effectively. . . . All of the following reports show continued enthusiasm

for reading and language arts, especially the communicating with others part.

Sharon: Starting with kindergarten my report card has all satisfactory. Some of these include: knowing my name, address, and telephone number; eight colors, good listener, etc. . .

In first grade my teacher has written a little note on the back of my report card stating: In reading she (me) easily learns new vocabulary words and does skills activities well. In oral reading she is improving by reading with more expression.

Students relied upon their mothers for information about their literacy development:

Cheryl: While talking to my mother last night, I remembered to ask her if they (my parents) read to me much while I was growing up.

Jane: My mother tells me that I was always a writer and a reader: "Ever since you could hold a pencil, you were drawing and writing."

Loni had her mom write a portion of her story because her mom's voice in it is so important to both mother and daughter.

Loni: Loni was almost 5 years old. It was a Saturday morning and we were getting ready to go downtown to see the Kearney State homecoming parade. As I was getting ready and helping others get ready, I glanced in Loni's bedroom and noticed she was sitting on her bed, intensely staring at one of her books. Suddenly, she threw the book across the room and yelled, "I can't read!" She began to cry and we began to talk. Her brother, who was only 11 months older, could read. She could not.

I selected one of her favorite books that had lots of repeating phrases and we took it with us to the parade. As we waited in the car,

> Loni "began to read." This reading consisted of memorizing the simple, repetitive lines. Over and over the book we went. By the end of the parade, Loni could "read" a book. That sense of being able to read like her brother was important to her.

Her Mom

Two of the students in the literacy block reported that they relied upon their father for their information. They did not state why they chose him. The notion of the mother as the holder of the family's literacy history is intriguing, but beyond the scope of this paper.

As the class expected, many of us relied upon self recollection as evidence of our attitudes, growth, learning, and changes over time. These recollections and the other evidence which accompanied them form the data of this study.

Data Analysis

The students were not required to engage in data analysis beyond what was needed to prepare, present and discuss their papers during our class session. They had actively gathered years of artifacts, recollections, interviewed significant caretakers, and more. They each handed in a written document, as described earlier. I typed each of their literacy autobiographies so that each was available in a computer application which I could manipulate.

Using Spradley's (1980) method of qualitative data analysis, the autobiographies were coded and sorted by relationships in a domain analysis. Seven broad categories emerged from the data (Figure 1). The uncovering of these categories involved reading and rereading the autobiographies as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The data in each of the seven broad categories was further analyzed and it is those domain analyses (Spradley,

1980) which serve as the basic framework for this paper. A taxonomic analysis (Spradley, 1980) was performed on the preservice teachers' attitudes towards their literacy development in school. A thematic analysis (Spradley, 1980) of the data is included in the discussion section of this paper.

Insert Figure 1 about here

School Life: The Reading History of Preservice Teachers

Preservice undergraduate students in the literacy block had a wide variety of recollections, attitudes, and beliefs about their reading development. Some of them recalled specific strategies they used as young readers and many recalled teaching methods used in their classrooms in elementary school. A few of the preservice teachers discussed reading beyond the basal reader. Each of these subcategories is discussed in this section.

Attitudes About Reading Development in School

Twelve of the twenty five preservice teachers in the class enjoyed reading as children. Sarah and Jamie are representative voices.

> **Sarah**: I have always loved to read. When I was in grade school I loved to go to the school library and sit in the reading loft and read books. I was constantly checking out books from the library and reading.
>
> **Jamie**: In elementary school I was a deep thinker and major daydreamer. I still daydream quite a bit, but not near as much as I did then. Reading really fed my love for daydreaming. I was always way off in another world when I was reading. My imagination would just flow. I remember always reading before I went to bed. Sometimes I would stay up really late to finish a book because I just couldn't put it down.

Janet and Ben typify the students who did not like to read because it was difficult or required.

> **Janet**: I never really liked reading and writing because I had to and that made it worse. High school wasn't too bad, although I had to read certain books then take quizzes over the chapters. If I did not have to worry about what questions would be on the quiz or in such a hurry to get done with the quizzes I would have liked reading the book a lot better.
>
> **Ben**: . . . I can remember having to make myself read and what a struggle it was . . . Overall my experiences with reading and writing have been limited to school and school work. Once in a while I would check a book out of the library to take home but for the most part I wouldn't read or write anything unless it was assigned.

A few of the students did not state a personal like or dislike of reading, rather their focus tended more towards what others thought of their reading.

> **Selina**: During the next two years, reading and language arts became my better subjects. I . . . excelled in these subjects at school [as indicated on a report card].

Jane was one of two students in the class with international living experience. She was the only one to learn English as her second language; she relied upon her teacher's assessment of her reading as support for her own beliefs or attitudes.

> **Jane**: . . . but by looking at my report cards it was clear that I was adjusted and ready to progress by the end of the year.

The impact of a particular teacher on a child's literacy was mentioned by four of the students. Their relationship with their teacher had an effect on their literacy attitudes; Joanna's response is representative of this.

> **Joanna:** Fifth grade was a kind of a love-hate relationship. At that point, I remember hating to read. On rare occasions we got to choose our books to read, the other times were books on her (Mrs. M--'s) shelf that looked like they were twenty years old. I received an "unsatisfactory" for reading that year.

Figure 2 summarizes the students' attitudes towards their reading development taxonomicly (Spradley, 1980).

Insert Figure 2 about here

Young Readers' Strategies in School

Only a few of the students reported on strategies they used as readers throughout their school experiences. Lynn explained that she skimmed chapter headings and picture captions to get an idea of what a textbook was trying to discuss, but she rarely read the entire piece because her skimming resulted in grades with which she was satisfied. Beth remembered her first grade experience and, later, her strategy for dealing with unknown words.

> **Beth:** My first remembrance of trying to read was in first grade. My teacher, Mrs. G--, had charts around the room with colors and color names written on them. The color itself did not present a problem, it was trying to identify the word that went along with it. . . .[In upper grades] . . .[o]ften times I would come across words that I did not understand. The dictionary was seldom consulted at these time, I

usually passed them by and hoped the word was not vital to the meaning of the story.

Although few reported on personal reading strategies they used in their early schooling, more than half of the students recalled specific instructional strategies used by their teachers.

Teachers' Strategies for Reading Instruction

Recollections of the basals typically rested in the characters present in many of the stories (Dick and Jane, Jack and Janet, Tom and Betty), the use of phonics, and teachers' use of worksheets and workbooks.

Ben: What I remember about first grade was reading Dick and Jane books and getting my ears pulled for talking during reading time. Second grade is a mystery to me. All I can remember was my teacher Mrs. W--, and that she was very strict!

Marcia: I began to learn to read in Kindergarten. We used the Scott Foresman basals. I'm sure everyone is familiar with the characters Dick, Jane and Spot. At that time, reading was taught using a phonics approach with sound families. I remember having a separate class for phonics, of course we couldn't have done it without our workbooks.

Cheryl: I think I actually began to learn to read when I was in the first grade. I remember having the Basal Readers and, of course, the work books.

Not all of the students have negative recollections of their experiences with basals, workbooks, and worksheets.

Denise: I remember being attracted by the bright, colorful covers of reading workbooks in kindergarten, and although they were challenging, I succeeded then and throughout my elementary years, always being placed in the top reading group.

The students in the midwestern state which was the site of this study often attended small schools. Barb's recollection of "The Little Red Book" (Ginn's basal) shows that her teacher used a basal reader with reading groups consisting of as few members as one. Barb's teacher also relied upon the students in the class to help one another.

Barb: I remember going up to the little table where our teacher did all the lessons. I specifically remember the "Little Red Book". I went to a very small one room school until I was in third grade. There was another girl in my grade level my kindergarten year, but after that I was the only one in my grade level. . . .I had a lot of help from students who were older than me since there was just one teacher.

Teachers typically had the children grouped for reading instruction.

Melanie: In third grade we began reading groups in which our class was divided into three groups. The groups were determined by what reading level you were at. I was in the middle or "average" level reading group.

Cheryl: We were put into reading groups by our reading ability and I still remember that we all knew who was in the high group. . .

Marcia was the only student reporting that there were no reading groups per se in her class.

Marcia: We did not have reading groups; the whole class of twenty-five had reading together.

The classroom dynamics which are inherent in grouping were discussed as individuals read their literacy autobiographies. Allison's recollections sparked much discussion in her group.

Allison: I was in the rainbow reading group. It was comprised of first and second graders. All of our classes were mixed with two grades. I felt

pretty special being a first grader in the reading group that included second graders. We read out of reading textbooks. There were quizzes and tests. I had a difficult time with these because I never really found enjoyment in these readings and therefore, my comprehension was not very good. I remember one time the teacher used me as an example because I could "silent read" without moving my lips, I was flattered.

Allison's relationship with the teacher, the text, and the other children reminded the students in her group of the affect associated with being in a reading group. The following class session, one of the students brought Nancy Mack's (1976) poem to class.

The Starling

I'm a Starling, see.
but I used to be a Robin.

We have Blue Jays and Robins
and Starlings in our class.

The blue Jays are the best readers.
I never was a Blue Jay,.

The Robins are pretty good readers.
I used to be a Robin...

But now I'm a Starling.
Starlings are the worst readers.

I was reading real good.

but I don't know what happened.

The words got too hard!

I guess . . .

I don't know.

But now I'm a Starling.

I look over at those Robins.

And I want to cry. (Mack, 1976, pp. 28-30)

Beyond the Basal

Melanie: In the second grade, the only things I remember were our teacher reading us Charlotte's Web and . . . learning contractions through worksheets and writing them on the chalkboard.

Melanie's recollections provide a segue to recollections beyond the basal reader. Just over one fourth of the students recalled specific books and the teachers who read the books to them. Joanna recalls her third grade teacher's voice as "poetic" during the reading of stories to the class. Sarah, who loved to read ever since she can remember, also remembers teachers who read to her.

Sarah: When I was in sixth grade my favorite teacher would read to us from a chapter book except she wouldn't tell us what it was until she finished the book. She covered the book with construction paper and called it the "red book," "blue book," or "orange book." I remember that I would always try to figure out what book she was reading so I could go check it out and read ahead of her. I didn't succeed in this too often but when she finished and finally revealed the title you can bet that I

was in the library as soon as I could checking out the book so I could read it again for myself.

There were other experiences which enriched classroom life.

Jill: Third Grade- . . .I remember having story time in the front of the room and each of us had to find a book we would like to read to the class and on our day we got to sit in the big chair and read to the class. It was an important job.

Many of the students recall being required to write book reports, and although some found it to be a perfunctory task, others enjoyed them.

Sally: In those 5 years [elementary school] I only remember two teachers that let us choose our own material to read and write book reports on.

Others wrote about dramatic (performance) experiences which they considered to be part of their literacy growth.

Joanna: . . . my mother reminded me of the class play we had called "The Rabbit and his Red Wings" where I played the fairy who grants the rabbit his wish for wings. Truthfully, the only things I remember about it are that I only had two lines (I don't even remember them) and that every other child in the play got to wear a costume except me. The teacher, Mrs. H--, told me to wear a "pretty dress." Excuse me? I was the darn fairy! If it wasn't for me the rabbit wouldn't even have his wings!!

Joanna's recollections demonstrate that relationships with teachers, Halliday's (1975) tenor, effect literacy development and attitudes.

Barb was the only student in the class who reported being in the resource room--beyond the basal, but in a direction most of the undergraduates had not experienced. She is a double major (elementary

education and special education) and imparted to the class a sensitivity to students who are struggling with reading.

> **Barb:** I cannot remember what grade first or second, we started to have a Resource Teacher come out once a week to help students who needed extra help with reading. Miss Dickey taught me a lot, she was my favorite teacher before I transferred to my other school. . . When I transferred to the other school I went to the Resource Room for extra help in reading. I continued this until I was in sixth grade, I hated it I felt like one of the dumb kids. My best friend had to go to the Resource Room so that made it easier. I never felt like the Resource Room helped me, we were probably too busy making fun of the teacher, nobody liked her. . . . I never had to go to the Resource Room [after sixth grade] and I did fine in high school, received at least average to above average grades and ended up on National Honor Society so my grades were good.

Selina was the only other student in the class reporting the experience of being viewed as below average as a reader.

> **Selina:** Finally I made it to kindergarten! I'm a young person for my grade so I'm assuming I started at age five. I attended two different grade schools in L--- [town] because my family moved in December. The first school told me I was slow and was going to have problems. My parents questioned this and became concerned since I had done so much practicing at home. When I transferred in December, everyone kept a close eye on me. Two months after attending this new school, I was considered an above average student and was placed with the first graders during reading time. One has to wonder what happened between the months of December through February.

Selina' story led to a discussion of the social construction of at-risk students (Richardson et al., 1989). How could a student be struggling in one setting, but appear to be fine in another? I pointed out how Selina' parents relied on the school for the definition of 'slow' and I helped the group engage in conversation about the position parents assume in relationship to the school, often relinquishing their knowledge and understanding of their children to perceived specialists at the school setting.

Donald's experience was more typical of the group.

Donald: I was placed in all the advanced reading classes, where we used higher level books and went at a more rapid pace. By the time I was in the 3rd grade I was reading from the 5th grade language arts book.

His autobiography led to a discussion of the Lake Wobegon effect (Phillips, 1990) since so many of the students were also above average. Quite often the above average students were allowed to read books beside the basal reader.

The preservice teachers mentioned these specific books beyond the basal:

A Tale of Two Cities
Black Boy
Brave New World
Charlotte's Web
Flowers in the Attic
Grimm Brothers
Hardy Boys
Judy Blume
Little House On The Prairie
Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle

Nancy Drew (mentioned twice)

Of Mice And Men

The Hobbit

To Kill A Mockingbird (mentioned 3 times, including below).

Others mentioned a title **and** the author or just an author:

Lovey by Jamie McCracken

The Heart is a Lonely Hunter by Carson McCullers

To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee

Dr. Seuss

V.C. Andrews series.

Although the students mentioned particular books and authors, the range of affect connected to these varied immensely. Allison and Joanna give some indication of the broadness of this spectrum of affect.

Allison: During this year, I was in the mood to read. I read the biography of Jim Morrison, No One Here Gets Out Alive. Laugh if you want, but, this book is one that changed my way of thinking about life.

Joanna: Even books that we had to read such as A Wrinkle in Time and The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe... I avoided because of my bad experience with "You have to read this book."

Figure 3 summarizes the domain analyses of the reading history school lives of the preservice teachers in this study.

Insert Figure 3 about here.

School Life: The Writing History of Preservice Teachers

The preservice teachers in this study expressed varied attitudes toward written language. Most of them considered the development of their

handwriting as synonymous with their written language development. Some of them discussed issues besides handwriting, such as journals, their reading/writing connection in the school experiences, spelling, and grading.

Attitudes Towards Written Language in School

Nine of the students reported that they liked writing as a child. Most of the positive reports focused on neatness of handwriting. Six of the students disliked writing because of grading practices of their teachers and their lack of ownership of topics chosen by the teacher rather than the student. Their attitudes will become more apparent as their voices are heard in the sections below.

Handwriting in School

Twelve of the preservice teachers wrote about handwriting first and foremost in their discussions of their written language development. Melanie sees a direct link between handwriting and written language use.

> **Melanie**: Teachers and students also complimented me on my handwriting which I think had a lot to do with my enthusiasm about writing.

Selina' recollection focuses more on quality.

> **Selina**: I was known to write very sloppy.

Sarah's recollection is of the amount of work involved in handwriting.

> **Sarah**: I also remember in third grade learning to write in cursive. We had to trace over the cursive letters a certain number of times and I absolutely hated doing that.

Denise looks back with disdain because of the lack of focus on written language, as opposed to handwriting.

Denise: Other than learning to print, and then to write in cursive in the third grade, I do not remember many opportunities to really write in school . . . until the fourth grade.

Once again the theme of the nature of the relationship with the teacher, Halliday's (1975) tenor, drives literacy memories for some of the students. Beth and Deena recall, with intense emotion, the fear and anger they felt as young writers.

Beth: Most of my memories [of written language development] are a blur until third grade. Miss M--- was teaching the class how to write g's and q's in cursive. I did not do a very good job on my worksheet so she told me I had to do it again before the day was over or stay after school until I was finished. I forgot about it until the bell rang and she said I could not leave. I was devastated! It was my first time that I had to stay after school and it broke my heart.

Deena: About halfway through third grade, my family moved. I hated my new school and my teacher. I remember her trying to teach cursive letters to me and I would throw a fit. I cried for weeks. I can totally remember looking up at the chalk board and copying down the letters. It felt like that is all I did. When I cried, she made me go into the classroom next door and write them in there. Of course I started to deal with my new surroundings and it helped knowing that next year I would be going to school with my sister.

The move to cursive was also a high point for some of the students in their writing recollections.

Joanna: I remember that in third grade is when you begin to write in cursive and I was so excited because that is how the grown-ups write so it must be pretty cool. I practiced all the time at home.

Beyond Handwriting in School

Although handwriting, neatness, and letter formation were the most salient of these preservice teachers' recollections of writing activity in school, some other uses of written language were cited. Four of the students recalled writing in journals or diaries as part of their school day. Only one student had a journal in elementary school.

> **Cheryl**: I didn't keep a journal until the fourth or fifth grade . . . I'm sure we didn't write in the journals everyday, but more like once a week.

Lynette's high school experience with a journal penetrated her personal life as well as her school life.

> **Lynette**: Then when I was a junior in high school my counselor was teaching psychology class. In that class she asked us to keep journals about our feelings and what was going on in our lives. I loved it!! I wrote all the time - between classes, in class, at night, in the morning -- just whenever. I kept a journal faithfully for two and half years then college came. Since then I have been so busy that keeping a journal or writing something that isn't required rarely, if ever, happens.

Journals were not the only activity recalled other than learning handwriting. Jill has a positive recollection of writing in second grade.

> **Jill**: In the second grade . . . my teacher had fun activities for us to do. We made our own telephone book and we read them to each other in class and alphabetized it together.

Jill also recalls the omnipresent book report.

> **Jill**: We had book reports due every week, but I didn't mind. My classmates and I had contests to see who could read the most. My

teacher really encouraged reading. I hope I can build that kind of motivation in my students.

Not all of the students have such fond recollections of book reports.

Lynette: When I was in fifth grade we were all assigned book reports. The book reports had to be on a Viking. I remember not being able to decide which Viking I wanted to write about so eventually Mrs. B--- told me to do Eric the Red. To this day I get shivers when I think of that report and the name Eric. I hated that assignment. Why was I doing it? Why Eric the Red? Why did it have to be written a certain way? What were paragraphs? Why did you use them? After that report I always felt a certain kind of dread every time I was assigned a writing assignment.

Three of the students reported on spelling tests. Don calls himself a "good speller" as measured by his performance on the weekly spelling tests he took. Jill was the only student to mention inventive spelling and the use of it in written language activity in school.

Jill: [In] first grade . . . my inventive spelling went into high gear. I was learning about myself and I wrote two books that were all about me.

Allison remembers the family routine, reminiscent of Gentry (1987) involved in performing well on spelling tests and focusing on the public recognition associated with it.

Allison: . . . we had weekly spelling lists. My sister and I would sit at the kitchen table every Thursday night practicing our spelling words for the test on Fridays. I usually got all of them right, and when I missed one, I was embarrassed because I would not get a gold foil sticker by my name.

Allison's concern over her grade on the spelling test was not unique. Other students had recollections about grading and the effect it had upon their written language activity.

Janet: And in older grades I remember writing some reports, just small or short ones. It seems as though everything I wrote was always graded, making it unenjoyable and put me in a pressure situation.

Figure 4 summarizes the domain analyses of the writing history school lives of the preservice teachers in this study.

Insert Figure 4 about here.

The preservice teachers in the literacy block typically separated home and school life in writing their literacy autobiographies. Their literacy activity outside of school when they were children is presented in the following sections.

Home Life: The Reading History of Preservice Teachers

Over half of the preservice teachers in the class fondly recalled being read to by their parents. Some of the students remember reading before they began school, many recalled home reading experiences during elementary school, and three mentioned reading experiences at home during high school. These domains are discussed in this section.

Home Read Alouds

Recollections of the home read aloud are rich in emotionality and intensity.

Denise: Helen Hayes once said, "From your parents you learn love and laughter and how to put one foot before the other. But when books are opened, you discover that you have wings." I feel really blessed to

not only have learned those things she spoke about from my parents, but also to have had them introduce me to reading and writing, and to help me discover those wings of literacy!

Jane: My mother told me that because I was the first child and she was a pre-school teacher, I learned to read and write at an early age. She and my dad spent much time with me (before the divorce) reading and teaching me to write.

Selina: [My parents] would read to me each day while I sat on their laps and followed along. This daily ritual happened every night before I went to bed or I would not lay down for them.

Loni: I remember story-time was every night after "bath time" and before "bedtime." My brother and I would curl up on the couch with one of my parents. I remember my mother had the craziest voice inflections.

Donald: The reason I was able to read when I was so young was, I believe, because my parents were very good about reading to me. They read a lot of books and my father would also read the newspaper to me, while I followed along. I also had to read back to them, which was an even greater help.

Ben sensed, perhaps as a future educator or parent, that being read to is an important part of literacy development. He offers reasons for the lack of the practice at his home.

Ben: There are six boys and one very special girl in my family. There is only approximately one and a half to two years difference between us boys. As you could guess spare time was not plentiful for my parents. Between working and keeping track of who was doing what, and

where, my parents didn't read to us much. I'm not saying they never read to us but not on a frequent basis.

The preservice teachers did not mention specific titles and Sharon was the only one to mention an "author", Mother Goose.

Reading Before Schooling

Sarah, Jane, and Allison discuss reading before they entered school.

Sarah: My mom told me that I had an even earlier experience with reading however. She said when I was around two and a half years old I found my Christmas presents that my mom had wrapped and hidden in a closet. I chose a gift to unwrap and it was a Mother Goose pop-up book. I unwrapped it and took it to my mom and asked her to read it to me. She did and then she wrapped it back up and gave it to me again on Christmas. I guess my love for books began even before I was aware of it.

Some homes appear to have been quite accepting of approximations.

Allison: I remember being three years old and listening to my mother and my five year old sister, Kelli, reading stories. My sister would be "reading" and I would listen. At times, I would try to read along with Kelli.

Jane: My mother tells me that I was always a writer and a reader: "Ever since you could hold a pencil, you were drawing and writing." She told me that I would read any book that was put in front of me (even when I didn't know how to read yet).

Once they began elementary school, the preservice teachers in my class began to read more on their own at home. Read alouds by parents were not reported beyond the beginning of second grade.

Home Reading During Elementary School

Some preservice teachers reported that once they entered elementary school they enjoyed reading at home, too. This sections reports only on those who enjoyed reading at home because those who disliked reading did not discuss reading at home. The preservice service teachers who did discuss home reading during the elementary school years usually desired an audience.

> **Sarah:** "Richard was a little early. Spring was a little late. 'Ah-choo,' sneezed Richard." Those are the first words that I remember "reading." When I was in kindergarten I loved the book called Richard the Robin and I wanted my parents to read it to me constantly. Finally, after hearing it so many times I could recite it on my own. I even knew the right time to turn the page. One day for kindergarten class I wanted to bring my book so I could read it to the whole class.
>
> **Selina:** Often times I would read stories to my younger sister or even my dolls. Going to the library and getting picture books was a thrill. Usually the dinosaur books were my favorite.

Jill was conscious of the switch from being the audience for some one else's reading to demanding an audience for her own reading.

> **Jill:** I was beginning to enjoy reading more too. I wanted to read to my parents instead of them reading to me.

Sharon recalls reading Dr. Seuss books, Deena read many of the Hardy Boys mysteries (a genre she prefers today) and Lynette remembered the number of her first library card, 10K, which she had when she was five years old. Reading at home meant reading fiction for all of these students.

Home Reading During High School

Allison liked to read at home during high school; she read novels and enjoyed reading the newspaper, too. Joanna extended beyond fictional literature, too.

> **Joanna**: . . . I began to read many books about the self. Most of them were "self help" books, but I read them all the time and applied what I was reading into my life. One of my favorite authors from that "period" in my life is Leo Buscaglia.

Figure 5 summarizes the domain analyses of the reading history home lives of the preservice teachers in this study.

Insert Figure 5 about here.

Home Life: The Writing History of Preservice Teachers

Seven of the preservice teachers reported writing at home either before they began formal schooling or during the years they were in elementary or high school. One nontraditional (career changing) student reported writing after high school graduation, prior to returning to college. Some of the students mentioned oral language in their homes.

Writing Before Schooling

Three of the students reported written language activity in their home before they began formal schooling. Janet's recollection is of approximations of letters and writing her name.

> **Janet**: . . . I always tried to write letters of the alphabet. Most of the writing was actually scribbling, but sometimes I got lucky and wrote a letter or two. I was able to write my name a little before Kindergarten.

Denise's recollection also mentions writing her name, but it is focused more towards writing to be involved with the rest of the world.

> **Denise**: I learned to print my name before kindergarten, my mom taught me, and right away I had the privilege of signing my name to the many cards she sent.

Lynn's recollections also focuses on her name, but the intent seems to be to provide information or demonstrate her ability to 'do'.

> **Lynn**: Before I started Kindergarten I could write my name and address and count well past 10, although my mother can't remember exactly how high.

Home Writing During Elementary School

The students who reported on written language at home during elementary school typically involved play and other children.

> **Allison**: The next recollection that I have is playing school. I would love to play school at my grandmother's house because she had a huge chalkboard. I would always be the teacher and I would write the alphabet in best printing.
>
> **Jane**: At seven, I had (and still do have) a very creative imagination. I was either pretending I was a movie star and that lived alone in this mansion with my cat, or I was a writer, artist, dancer or actress. I would do anything that challenged my imagination. I spent many afternoons, writing, reading, singing, acting or dancing by myself. Sometimes I was even able to recruit some neighborhood friends to play along. And it wasn't unusual for my mom to come home to find several neighbors sitting around the living room watching me perform a dance I had made up. A friend of mine and I even did a roller skating show complete with commercials, costumes and curtains on our driveway

for the whole neighborhood. Of course I always wrote and directed everything.

Joanna appeared more pensive as a child than most of the other preservice teachers. She tended to write alone at home.

Joanna: In sixth grade I also began keeping a personal journal or diary. I remember starting it thinking that someday I would look back on it and see how neat it was to read about my childhood days.

Joanna's very personal use of written language extended into her reading (with a focus on self-help books) and her use of the personal journal continues to this day.

Home Writing During High School and Before College

Only two students specifically reported engaging in written language activity at home during high school or before college. Joanna discussed her journal.

Joanna: My senior year is probably the most odd. I was going through the mid-teen psycho depression--familiar with it? I began to do a lot of writing, not necessarily about butterflies and rainbows, but about a void I felt in my life.

Lynn began an intensive letter writing relationship.

Lynn: After graduation my boyfriend joined the service and we exchanged several letters a week during the months he was away at basic training. Eventually those letters changed my life in a big way, and we decided to get married. The letter writing between us continued after we were married and he was in Germany, and eventually I joined him there and wrote letters to our families in the States.

Oral Language in the Home

The use of oral language was deemed relevant to a literacy autobiography by some of the preservice teachers. Selina recalls her mother in a teacher-like capacity.

> **Selina**: My mom also made our car rides a learning experience. As we drove to our destinations, she would tell me specific letters, numbers, and colors to find on billboards, cars, houses, and signs. I enjoyed this game and took it very seriously. Again, this was a game we played every time we were in the car. Not only did I look for things, we would sing together too.

Lynn views the oral language activity of her home as one significant facet of the context for her literacy growth.

> **Lynn**: I guess you could say in a way that my literacy began with the first sounds I heard from inside my mother. Knowing my mother, they were words of encouragement, and anticipation, and song. My mother loves to sing.

Her view of the oral language setting continued through the years as she was growing. In a sense, she saw her family as teaching her to read the world as well as the word (Freire, 1970).

> **Lynn**: Dinner time was a family time in my house and it was also a time that we shared our days. We would talk about school, or other events, my father's work, family, current events. I think that this is an important part of my literacy development because it is what keeps us in contact with the world and what was going on around us, and that is definitely part of being well-informed and educated.

Loni discusses the importance of play, perhaps intuiting Vygotsky's notion of a child being a head taller when at play (Vygotsky, 1978).

Loni: I also remember make believe worlds I lived in with my stuffed animals, dolls, and occasional friend. We would create and act out adventures. Some of the best conversations I ever had were with my stuffed animals (they're good listeners).

Figure 6 summarizes the domain analyses of the home writing history lives of the preservice teachers in this study.

Insert Figure 6 about here.

Most of the preservice teachers presented their literacy autobiographies chronologically, leading to their present literacy lives. Their present literacy lives are as varied and complex as their pasts.

The Present Reading Lives of Preservice Teachers

Preservice teachers' did not report that their present literacy lives are separated along the boundaries of home and school, although some of the focus was on the semester in college versus time away from college and coursework.

Seven of the preservice teachers in the literacy block said that they like to read today. Four of those seven stated that they only read text books for courses. Recall that over half of the students in the literacy block liked reading as children indicating a decrease in finding reading enjoyable. Eight said that they did not like to read at this point in time. Three others said that they liked to read when they could choose the material, but that rarely happened except for during vacations. In this section of the paper, the preservice teachers' present attitudes about reading are discussed. Some will discuss reasons for lacking enjoyment of reading and skills they believe they lack, while others discuss why they like to read. Those perceiving themselves

as 'good' readers and those perceiving themselves as 'poor' readers discuss strategies they use as readers.

Lacking Enjoyment and Lacking Skills

Ben believes that reading is a chore which is never used for pleasure.

Ben: I'm still the same way now. Unless it's assigned for some class I really have to make myself read a book.

Melanie believes that she missed some critical window for reading enjoyment.

Melanie: In analyzing myself now in college, I have noticed that I have a lack of enjoying to read and this includes everything from textbooks to newspapers to letters I get in the mail. I asked my mother why she thought that was since all my other siblings are reading fanatics. She believes it's because I missed a lot of school when I was young due to being sick a lot. Especially in the first grade when I missed out on over a month of school. Because I had mono. Now I see that this was a crucial period where most reading development takes place and I missed out on a large proportion of that time.

Selina and Don summed up the feelings of the preservice teachers who described a negative attitude toward.

Selina: I consider myself a slow reader and hate doing it.

Don: I never learned to read for the enjoyment of it.

Barb, who had been in a resource room, maintains the belief that reading is hard work and well worth the struggle.

Barb: Maybe I should have accepted the extra help when it was offered to me and put aside my stubbornness and maybe my reading would be better today. There is really no way of telling. Today I enjoy reading,

but it just takes me a little bit longer to get through the material. There's always room for improvement at any age!

Marcia is more inclined to blame the text than herself.

Marcia: I know from experience I am a much better reader when I am reading something I enjoy opposed to something that is boring. I might have to read a textbook several times before I comprehend what I have read; whereas, when I am reading for enjoyment I remember events in the book quite clearly.

Enjoying Reading

Becky is typical of the students who like to read. She enjoys it and focuses on comprehension as a measure of her pleasure. The preservice teachers who struggle with reading typically report not getting enough of what they perceive to be the intended meaning of the text. The preservice teachers who enjoy reading are more secure in their making of meaning.

Becky: ...I feel I am a fairly good reader because I enjoy reading. I also have no difficulty in understanding what I read in the newspaper, homework, etc.

Sally: I enjoy reading, even required reading for class. Both of my parents are readers and I think seeing them enjoy books and newspapers has given me a greater appreciation for reading. I read the paper every night, cover to cover.

Becky and Sally are aware of the differences of genre between text books from other types of reading and appear confident with either.

Preservice teachers who consider themselves good readers tend to get lost in their reading, as typified by Cheryl.

Cheryl: I do enjoy reading for pleasure and it seems like I never get a chance to do it anymore. Once I start reading a good book then I have a tendency to put everything else off until I have completed the book.

Cheryl does not extend her love of reading across all genres and reports struggling with texts.

Cheryl: As far as reading text, I've always had a hard time. I have to read parts over two and three times before I really tuned myself into what I'm reading. This is because I find it is boring or I have something else on my mind. If I don't understand something I might just skip it. If I am reading something for pleasure it might be hard to get my attention.

The love of reading seems to be sacrificed in some way for the goal of finishing college.

Becky: I wish I had more time to read books that I really want to.

Sarah: Even today I love to read just for pleasure. Unfortunately during the school year I don't do a lot of extra reading for my own enjoyment because I'm kept so busy reading school books. During the summer, however I usually have books that I've been wanting to read and I'll stay up late at night to read them.

Jamie: When I went to college I quit reading for pleasure altogether. I spent so much time reading textbooks I really didn't have the time or interest in reading anything else.

Strategies Readers Use

Whether they considered themselves 'good' or 'poor' readers, the preservice teachers in this study mentioned comprehension, slowing down, and regressions as signs of reading ability. Those who consider themselves good readers are comfortable with their strategies, seeing room for growth. Those who consider themselves poor readers are unhappy with the amount of work reading takes, especially in light of how little they recall.

Preservice teachers reported a variety of strategies they use as readers. The individuals who feel they are "good" readers typically reported that they enjoy reading and remember what they read. Denise's discussion of herself as a good reader and the generalizations she provides summarize, quite accurately, the beliefs and attitudes of the other 'good' readers in the class.

> **Denise**: I consider myself a good reader because I am able to read the level of material I want and need to, and understand it, and I enjoy reading for pleasure. Also, I think a good reader needs to recognize that there is always room for improvement, and there are things I would like to improve, such as, reading slower and digesting the material as opposed to skimming, and taking the opportunity and time to read a wider variety of material. In addition, those who are good at what they do are constantly learning, and I believe it is the same for readers. Good readers find out the meanings and pronunciations of words they do not know, they ask questions of the text, of the author, and of how it all relates to themselves, as the reader, and their life experiences. Good readers are not passive, but active, and that is something that I sometimes struggle with, especially when I am not reading merely for my own enjoyment.

Sharon discusses the differences in her attitudes toward reading as a function of genre and the relationship between genre and time.

> **Sharon:** I'm a slow reader and it is hard for me to keep on track. The exception to this is an article about education, students and sports. Basically I enjoy reading about real stories and real people. Textbook readings take twice as long with half my interest.

The belief that slowing down will help one to remember more of what has been read is a common belief in this group of preservice teachers. The use of the dictionary was mentioned quite a bit, although class discussion revealed that such use may be more limited than reported in the literacy autobiographies.

> **Sally:** When I am reading I will go back and reread something that didn't make sense and look up words I don't know as I read. I know I tend to read fast. To be a better reader I need to slow down and concentrate on what I am reading. If something is confusing I will read it out loud. This seems to help me focus again.

Ben, who does not like to read, relies on the general strategy of 'working harder'.

> **Ben:** I have always had to work at reading and writing,

Don points out that attitude and interest are important parts of comprehension. His belief that regressions are always a sign of poor reading was information I used in planning subsequent presentations and discussions about reading process and strategies.

> **Don:** I have trouble remembering what I read, and often jump back to words in a paragraph. The biggest difference between good readers and poor readers is the number of regressions in a sentence.
>
> Comprehending what you read is another factor that sets apart good

and poor readers. Many times I have to read a paragraph over because I don't remember what I just read. I have been successful in school because I put extra effort into my work. With reading, it takes me longer than most people but I get done. If I am interested in what I'm reading, I read better. I think I have a negative attitude about reading material that doesn't interest me.

There are some similarities between those who enjoy reading and those who don't. Both groups discussed regressions; those enjoying reading found regressions a natural part of reading while those who did not enjoy reading pointed to regressions as an inherently difficult facet of the reading process. The preservice teachers who feel they are good readers generally like to read and are confident in regressing, can cope comfortably with not comprehending completely, and are aware that their reading changes somewhat across different texts (genres). The confident readers longed for more time to read items of their own choosing. Those reporting a dislike for reading also stated that they were slow and do not like how hard reading is. "Hard" meant requiring regressions, reading materials not of their own choosing, not of interest to them, and time consuming.

Figure 7 summarizes the domain analyses of the present reading lives of the preservice teachers in this study.

Insert Figure 7 about here.

The Present Writing Lives of Preservice Teachers

Twelve of the preservice teachers in this study reported that they presently enjoy writing. Most discussed the interactional and personal functions (Smith, 1983) of writing as in diaries and letters. More of the

students enjoyed writing than reading and there was no consistent relationship between enjoyment of one and the other. Some who find reading pleasurable may or may not enjoy writing. Some who find writing displeasurable may or may not enjoy reading.

Three of the students stated that they did not enjoy writing in any way. Eight did not mention written language in their autobiographies; they focused more on reading as a window into their literacy lives. Two students said that they enjoyed writing when they could choose what was written, free of the threat of grades and other evaluative measures. Each preservice teacher's very individual interpretation of their experiences has resulted in unique attitudes. The purpose of this section is present some of the broad spectrum of their attitudes towards written language.

Enjoying Writing

Most of the students who stated that they enjoy writing and view themselves as writers discussed letter writing, journal writing and writing stories and poems as pleasurable facets of their lives as writers. Lynette discusses writing as a way of reviewing, exploring, and planning.

> **Lynette**: . . . any time I have had any personal problem in my life I start a journal and keep it until I have worked through the problem. I think that is really important. I have little notebooks stashed everywhere half or three fourth used. You learn a lot about yourself from reading those old journals. You can see how much you've grown and how much more you need to grow.

Allison feels the same way; her writing serves her very personal purposes but is subsequently disposed of.

Allison: I still write though. In fact, I write a lot because it is very therapeutic to me. Whenever I write to relieve my thoughts on paper, I usually throw it away.

Don did not like to read as a child and, looking back on writing in his earlier schooling, he discussed the understanding and proper use of nouns and verbs as being important. Recently, he began reading about the outdoors in a variety of magazines; his writing has become a new interest because he has taken ownership of it.

Don: Throughout my life, my writing has never really been relevant to me. Now I write about relevant issues in my life. The outdoors and my emotions are two things that I like to write about.

Although we had been in class for only two weeks when we completed our literacy autobiographies, and Don had not previously kept a journal, he was quite excited about the interactive nature of the activity. He had never written from his heart so I inquired about his new found interest in writing. He sang praises of the instructor (me) and the invitation to engage in an interactive journal as sufficient to open him to his own literacy. His very contagious excitement did contribute much to the context of the classroom.

Barriers to Writing

The fear of taking a risk, because of ensuing evaluations by others, and being forced to write on topics dictated by others constitute the major reasons the preservice teachers do not enjoy writing. Janet states the situation quite succinctly.

Janet: I enjoy writing when it is not grade oriented such as writing letters to friends or my family or writing in my journal or diary. I have a lot of ideas and things to say. I just have a hard time putting them on paper. . [when they are graded].

The anxiety associated with evaluation is expressed by Becky, too, who considers herself a writer but is quite aware of the risks, which undermine confidence.

> **Becky**: Two semesters ago I took a fiction writing class. It was very hard for me to write stories and then share them with the entire class. Sometimes it felt as though we were putting ourselves up for rejection by our fellow classmates. I feel I am a writer - just not a confident one!

Denise is an avid writer, a lover of reading, and has had a history of loving both of these modes. I place her in the category of 'barriers' because she lacks confidence, reflective of her school experiences.

> **Denise**: The older I get the more I realize the importance of writing. Although I do not consider myself a good writer, through my practices of regular letter writing, keeping a spiritual journal, and writing to vent my frustrations or celebrate my joys, I feel like I have begun to progress.

Marjorie's love of writing is marred by the teacher's red pen. She does not want to take the risk writers take.

> **Marjorie**: Honestly, I like to write, but none of my teachers do [like my writing], because all my work comes back with red marks and arrows! That is so discouraging! Now, I have no confidence and do not enjoy writing for a grade.

Sharon feels strongly about with point of origin in her writing.

> **Sharon**: I enjoy writing when I'm in a creative mood. It is difficult for me to write when I'm supposed to write about one [assigned] subject but thinking of something else.

Marcia's sense of a writer's need to pay attention to and write from her point of origin is poignantly, though rather sadly, stated.

Marcia: I do not feel that I am a writer. I think that people who write do it often. . . .I feel people write to share their life experiences with others. They also write to learn more about themselves and as means of communication.

Sarah demonstrates the complexity of ownership. Sarah is the student who loved to read for as long as she can remember. She enjoyed having her first story greeted with enthusiasm in first grade, at school and at home. But Sarah does not find pleasure in writing unless she is writing to express emotions she would rather not speak aloud. When, for whatever reason, she can not express herself orally, the need to express herself overflows into written language.

Sarah: Although I love to read I can't say the same thing for writing. It's not that I mind writing if I have to but I don't sit down and write in a journal everyday just for the pleasure of it. Once in a while I will write down what I'm feeling. Usually when I'm doing this it's because I'm frustrated or upset about something and it's easier for me to write down my feelings than to try and express them in words.

I include Sarah's discussion of her written language in the 'barriers' section of this paper because it seems that a certain degree of regularity or normalcy in her life is a barrier to her use of written language.

Figure 8 summarizes the domain analyses of the present writing lives of the preservice teachers in this study.

Insert Figure 8 about here.

Discussion

The analysis of the preservice teachers' literacy autobiographies influenced the design of the literacy block for the semester in which the autobiographies were collected and subsequent semesters. The work also has some implications for understanding the literacy lives of preservice teachers. There are also some indications for future studies.

Designing Methods Courses

This study was initiated in order to gather information which would be used to develop the literacy block classroom activity consistent with the way I believe elementary teachers can design the literacy activity of their classrooms. The literacy autobiographies served as a point of origin for development of a context for teacher development. The literacy autobiographies generated strong feelings of community as students revealed their attitudes and found others with similar feelings. The commonalties supported bonding, but so did the differences. Students were amazed at and appreciative of each other. The intensity of affect and commitment to learning with which the course began served as a springboard to our study of literacy processes and teaching strategies.

Although many basal-type texts exist for preservice teachers in undergraduate literacy block courses, I chose to have the students read professional books (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983; and others) in professional development groups. The groups then shared and demonstrated their learning by engaging the rest of the class in authentic reading and writing activities based on their reading. We also read articles from *Language Arts, Reading Teacher,* and other professional journals. The course was NOT a survey of many different ways to teach reading and writing. It was a

reading-writing classroom based in research and theoretically grounded in a holistic perspective (Short & Burke, 1989) towards reading and writing.

My justification for such an approach lies within the literature and within the autobiographies presented earlier. The students read Graves (1990) and worked at discovering their own literacy while they explored the possibilities for literacy activity in our class and in elementary classrooms by reading, writing, talking, and five visits to outstanding classrooms. I was inspired by Newman's (1991) description of teachers working together in an 'institute' format to address personal and professional issues of their own literacy. The autobiographies and previous research nagged at the design of a course which could influence personal and professional literacy attitudes and practices of preservice teachers.

Literacy Lives of Teachers and Preservice Teachers

Although the literature presents 'love of reading' as foundational to teaching reading, the preservice teachers in this study did not all love reading and they reported reading and writing for a wide range of reasons. Perhaps we need to validate their reasons for engaging in literate activity and not hold 'love' as the most prestigious reason for reading while labeling all others as reduced reasons. There are many reasons for engaging in literacy activity.

Some of the students engaged in literate activity because it was a tool which was useful in gaining information which would subsequently act as a vehicle for educational success. If we value such success, and it appears that our society does, we need to validate this reason for reading and writing.

Other students were involved in literacy as self exploration (Rosenblatt, 1938). Such students, like Joanna, are confident and express what they are learning about themselves as a way of becoming more powerful individuals. Their literacy is the context in which they empower themselves.

Joanna was coming to terms with herself and her teacher through her writing when she wrote, ". . . every other child in the play got to wear a costume except me. The teacher, Mrs. H, told me to wear a "pretty dress." Excuse me? I was the darn fairy! If it wasn't for me the rabbit wouldn't even have his wings!!"

The social activity of literacy (Bloome, 1983) is another reason students engage. Jane's plays are probably the most salient example of this as she worked with her friends to write and produce plays. And the many home read aloud experiences which are saturated with fond memories of family life are social activities which are viewed as high prestige social aspects of literacy. There are, again, other literacy 'reasons' which demand and deserve as high a prestige as 'love of reading' among teachers and teacher educators.

Some students engaged in literacy activity because of the status such activity afforded them. They mentioned their reading group and were shocked to learn that Barb was not an average or above average reader. The notion of status inherent in reading (and later studying) demands legitimization and high prestige because of the results of such activity. The student who reads efferently (Rosenblatt, 1978) may go on to be the most reliable mechanic in the neighborhood, a good teacher, or an outstanding neurosurgeon, yet may also be someone who does not read for pleasure or out of a love for reading.

The student whose reading is a 'chore' or a burden has suffered long and hard. Such a student feels intense guilt, yet under closer exploration, the student typically discovers, as Don did, that literate activity, although difficult, fits one of the categories described above. It serves as an information source, a social activity etc. and, as such, may be viewed as a legitimate reason for reading. The guilt over not loving reading may be dropped and the anxieties

over speed and recall may also diminish as one comes to understand that proficient readers do not always expect to read quickly or with total recall. How this discovery by a preservice teacher will impact classroom practice remains to be seen.

The preservice teachers also began to see the importance of the tenor (Halliday, 1975) of their relationships within the social context of their literacy activity. The point is that preservice and inservice teachers read and write for a variety of reasons and within specific and varied relationships. Figure 9 summarizes the preservice teachers reasons for engaging in literacy activity.

Insert Figure 9 about here.

Perhaps it is time to accept the broad range of reasons preservice teachers engage in literacy activity as rooted in meaning. They are all meaning makers (Wells, 1986) and the meaning they are making of their personal and professional literacy processes is influenced by the affect attached to it. Methods courses, such as the literacy block, need to acknowledge and help students explore and make sense of their own literacy lives. Such sense-making includes the students' background affect attached to reading and writing because making meaning and sense is at the heart of holistic practice and educative experiences (Dewey, 1938).

An Agenda for Continued Research

The preservice teachers' final evaluations of themselves and the literacy block were quite positive and powerful. They discussed their growth, the changes they made, the rediscovery (or initial discovery) of their own literacy and how all of these would effect the classrooms they would eventually enter as teachers. The preservice teachers shared many memories

together, inside jokes, sorrows, and celebrations brought to the class, resulting in bonds which lasted the semester and into student teaching. The members of the class have contacted me and are planning to meet regularly throughout their student teaching because they have come to rely upon each other for support. One area of further research in which I am presently involved is following some of the students into their student teaching and first few years of teaching. That data will be collected over the next few years.

There is need for more research into the tenor of relationships within the social contexts of literacy development. I use the plural, contexts, because of the many contexts the preservice teachers in this study described.

One nagging question is whether or not the discovery or rediscovery of one's literacy will support the creation of environments for children in which the children can discover or uncover their literacy in a supportive and genuine way. The culture of the school (Sarasson, 1971) and the newness to teaching often result in little change in pedagogy (Goodlad, 1990). Perhaps other structures for support are needed if we want to achieve the kind of classrooms Harste & Short with Burke (1988) show to be possible. Growing teachers (Jones, 1993) undoubtedly involves more than a one semester experience.

Many of the earlier studies cited in this paper focus on teachers' love of reading and call for teachers to examine their attitudes towards their own literacy. A question which emerges from this study is the teacher's need for a love of reading in order to teach reading. Perhaps we need to study how reading is used by other individuals. The car mechanic who enjoys making engines run smoothly might rely upon reading to gain the information needed for immediate application. Such an individual might or might not enjoy reading; the focus is on getting information in order to engage in

reading. This is a call, then, for literacy research across other vocations or professions to explore the uses or purposes of and attitudes toward literacy activity and the ways in which those attitudes effect the broader professional lives of those involved. If we want to teach our children to read and write the way readers and writers read and write, then we need to study a broad spectrum of readers and writers. This research could elaborate the classroom teacher's repertoire of reasons for reading and writing and justify a broader range of classroom reading and writing activity. It would also support a broad range of attitudes about reading as highly prestigious, rather than limiting 'love' as the most prestigious reason for reading.

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Figure Caption

Figure 1. Broad categories from which other domains emerged.

1. Range and Nature of Evidence
2. Past: Learning to read in school
3. Past: Learning to write in school
4. Past: Reading activity at home
5. Past: Writing activity at home
6. Present: Reading and Writing

Figure Caption

Figure 2. Taxonomic analysis/summary of the preservice teachers' attitudes toward their reading development in school.

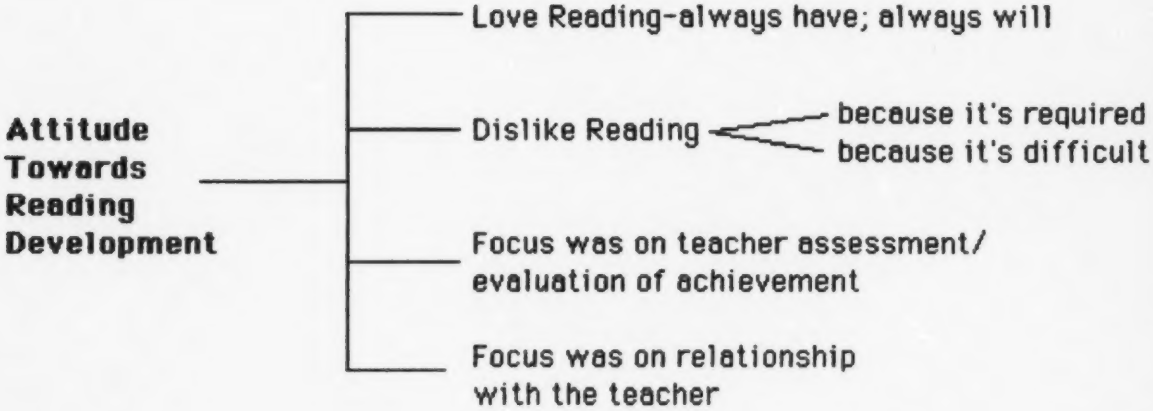

Attitude Towards Reading Development
Love Reading-always have; always will
Dislike Reading
because it's required
because it's difficult
Focus was on teacher assessment/ evaluation of achievement
Focus was on relationship with the teacher

Figure Caption

Figure 3. Summary of the domain analyses of the reading history school lives of the preservice teachers.

	(semantic relationship)	
Phonics		
Teacher read alouds		
Workbooks & worksheets		
Reading Groups		
Basals		
Other children's role in reading at school		
Remedial reading, resource, & giftedness	relate(s) to	learning to read in school
Tests		
Class & school size		
Readiness		
Nonbasal specific titles & authors		
Explicitly expressed attitudes & beliefs		
Child readers' strategies		
Teachers teaching beyond the basal		

Figure Caption

Figure 4. Summary of the domain analyses of the writing history school lives of the preservice teachers.

	(semantic relationship)	
Handwriting & letter formation		
Learning cursive		
Choice of subject (ownership)		
Journals & Diaries		
Reading/writing connection	relate(s) to	learning to write in school
Grading		
spelling		
Publishing of own writing		
Questions about own written language development		
Writing as a social activity		

Figure Caption

Figure 5. Summary of the domain analyses of the reading history home lives of the preservice teachers.

	(semantic relationship)	
Parents reading aloud to open new worlds		
Parents reading aloud to spend time with children		
Parents reading aloud to be in close physical proximity		
Parents reading aloud as part of a family ritual		reading activity of preservice teachers as children at home
Parents reading aloud to support emerging reading	relate(s) to	
Parents reading aloud but not regularly		
Children approximating reading aloud have approximations accepted		
Fewer reporting reading at home during elementary years		
Even fewer reporting reading at home during high school years		

Figure Caption

Figure 6. Summary of the domain analyses of the home writing history lives of the preservice teachers.

	(semantic relationship)	
Prior to formal schooling, children approximating letters of the alphabet and name writing		
Prior to formal schooling, children's functional use of name writing on cards	relate(s) to	writing activity of preservice teachers as children at home
At elementary school age, children play using chalkboard, writing letters, writing stories, songs, plays, and writing in a journal		
During high school years, writing in a journal and writing letters		

Figure Caption

Figure 7. Summary of the domain analyses of the present reading lives of the preservice teachers.

	(semantic relationship)	
Reasons for lacking enjoyment		
Comfort level with comprehension		
Reading as a chore		
Reading rate or speed		
Blaming self for deficits		preservice
Lacking a reading skill	relate(s) to	teachers
Strategies readers use		present
Reasons for liking reading		attitude toward
Blaming the text for deficits		reading
Getting 'lost' in a book		
Confidence across genres		
Reading for pleasure		
Reading texts, not self-selected (ownership)		

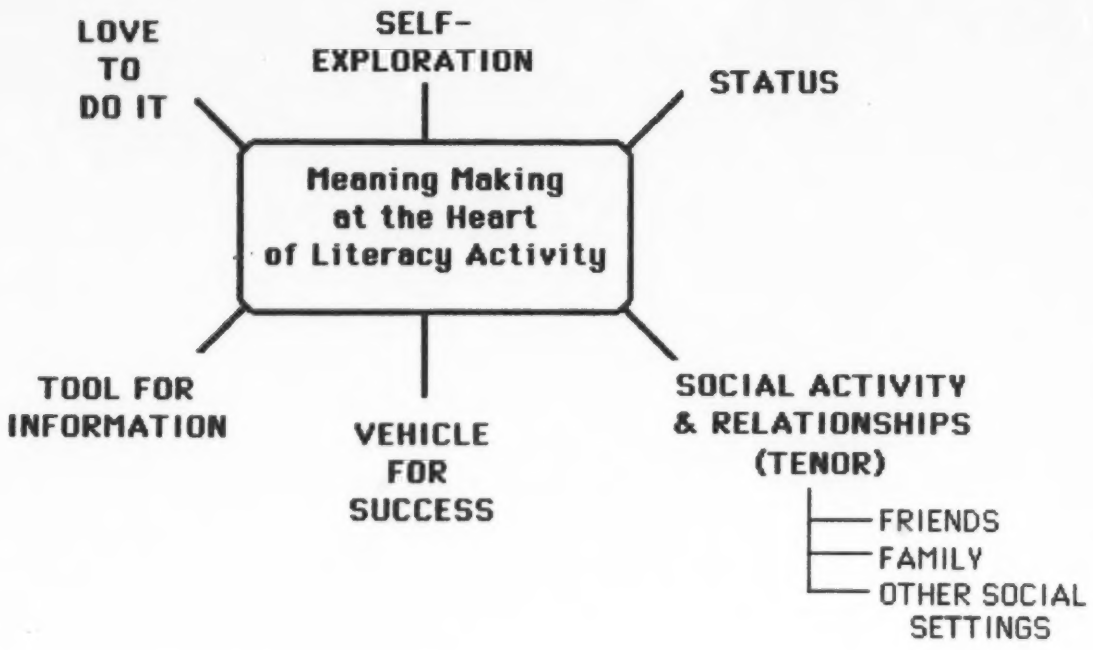
Figure Caption

Figure 8. Summary of the domain analyses of the present writing lives of the preservice teachers.

	(semantic relationship)	
Having a reason to write A personal understanding of 'good' writing Having personal strategies for writing Choice and ownership Lack of a specific skill Feeling stifled by evaluation Safety issues around grading	relate(s) to	preservice teachers present attitude toward writing

Figure Caption

Figure 9. Summary of preservice teachers reasons for engaging in literacy activity, a focus on reasons rather than attitudes.


LOVE TO DO IT
SELF-EXPLORATION
STATUS
Meaning Making at the Heart of Literacy Activity
TOOL FOR INFORMATION
VEHICLE FOR SUCCESS
SOCIAL ACTIVITY & RELATIONSHIPS (TENOR)
FRIENDS
FAMILY
OTHER SOCIAL SETTINGS